A Poem of Utopia

Written by the Poetic Zeitgeist of the 21st Century

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On Sunday 7/10/2022, J. Martin Strangeweather contacted a diverse selection of poets via Facebook, sending the first 100 that randomly came up on his newsfeed this message:

“Hey there. I’m working on a collective poem about utopia, or simply a better world, and I’m asking various poetic minds from around the globe to contribute their thoughts. If you’re up for it, I’d like you to write a line or two (or however many you wish) on utopia, whatever that term means to you (the good, the bad, and the ugly) and send it to me by next Sunday (7/17/2022). I’m going to assemble everyone’s responses into a poem sometime in the not-too-distant future. No one will be given credit (your contribution will be anonymous), as the poem will simply state that it was written by the 21st-century poetic zeitgeist. If you don’t wish to participate (or don’t have the time), I fully understand and still respect your voice/work/mind.”

The response was truly overwhelming. And now, free for the benefit of all, here is the definitive and comprehensive exploration of utopia, collectively penned by the poetic visionaries of our time.

We were dancing next to each other at the Time-Travelers Masquerade Ball when she asked if I had ever been to Discotopia. “I don’t get out much,” I told her. “I’m a mad scientist.”

She ceased her Venusian voguing, “My fathers were mad scientists. I love mad science. The madder the better. So, what are you working on?”

I stopped doing the Spaceman Shuffle. “Lately I’ve been trying to create a new world.”

Aristotle cut in, “In framing an ideal, we may assume what we wish, but should avoid impossibilities.” He was pop-locking like a robot, except robots dance much better.

The Marx-Bot 2000 lumbered across the dancefloor, singing a different tune than the band: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles! Workers of the world, unite!” The children of paradise just kept grooving. “Abolish private property! All housing should be free!” blared the Marx-Bot 2000 from its bullhorn mouth. “Education should be free, including college and trade schools! Public transportation should be free! Telecommunication services should be free! Nutritious food and beverages should be free!” The children of paradise were too busy vibing to care.

the children of paradise live for concerts and orgies
striving to exist in the present moment
to “be here now” at all times
losing themselves in the electronic hive tribe vibe
giving themselves
understanding without knowing
consuming the psychedelic flesh of raw nature
confronting suffering and death
every second of their lives
they live, I mean, *really live*
they laugh
they dance
they sing
they love, I mean, *really love*

It’s a world elsewhere for sure,
But here, where it has to be
Where?
In the coffin of the third eye,
In the stomach like Uranus swallowed
Before and after we were born?
Ushered out of time and place: please,
Not that again, the fool’s red Arnheim.

The new gatekeepers always turn out to have the same problems as the old gatekeepers: classism and favoritism.

So many noble tongues trading one "-ism" for another.
So many gifted minds trading one facade for another.
So many innocent souls trading one hell for another.

utopia is a drug
that makes you forget the past
imparting visions of a wondrous future
which transform to shackles upon sobering up
in the cargo hold of a slave ship

Every dystopia was once a vision of utopia.

Our claimed innocence
is based on false images of a parallel present.

The tyrant's dream of utopia
is the dystopian nightmare of the underprivileged.

Your lies enslave you
to everyone who believes
in the false reality
you've made your prison.

All the villains in all those dystopian novels are living in their version of utopia.

If only we had an army of beatnik martyrs,
none would ever be needed.
(after Edward Bellamy)

And the Marx-Bot 2000 has been tampered with, repeating the same message over and over: "From each according to their privilege, to each according to their connections."

These lines were kept anonymous so the words of the unpublished would receive as much consideration and respect as those of the poet laureate.

The first "noble lie" of Play-Doh's Republic: The ruling class must never talk shit on the gods no matter how shitty the gods act, lest the public become disheartened.

The second “noble lie” of Play-Doh’s Republic: Although the ruling class knows all mortals are created equal, they must nevertheless convince the masses that some are destined for greater or lesser prospects.

The third and most heinous “noble lie” of Play-Doh’s Republic: Noble lies are necessary to run society smoothly.

The wise and honorable ruler is eventually displaced by the wealthy and dishonest ruler who is displaced by the licentious and tyrannical ruler who is displaced by mob rule, who choose the wisest and most honorable among them to lead, starting the cycle anew. Every time the wheel goes ’round, civilization gains just a little more ground, but is utopia the destination or the journey?

Women will hold all positions of power and responsibility in the future. All food will be plantstuff grown by official collective farming.

All cooking utensils and tableware are edible and nutritious in the utopian era, conserving over 500,000,000,000 gallons of water in dishwashing per year.

Every new invention must pass an environmental impact inspection, then an economic impact evaluation, then a series of psychological, sociological, physiological, existential, and spiritual impact assessments, and finally a *do-we-really-need-this* survey.

Pro-choice and pro-life finally make peace after medical science invents a simple procedure to abort unwanted pregnancies without any harm to the fetus, putting the embryos into cryogenic stasis or continuing their gestation in artificial wombs.

All persons wanting to procreate must fill out an application and pass a parenting exam. The exam is simple. Most people fail it.

Childrearing is one of the highest paid professions in utopia. The job entails annual performance evaluations.

Poor parenting skills play a large part in humanity's ills, creating multigenerational patterns of prejudice and abuse. In the utopian future, a majority of the parenting will be conducted by artificially intelligent nanny-bots, and any child may choose to leave their family and check into a state-funded housing unit upon reaching the age of fifteen, the legal drinking age.

Many speculative utopian writers both ancient and contemporary believe offspring should be ignorant of their biological parents, and identity be formed from the cultural bank of the entire world.

Love is free and abundant in utopia. Nuclear families are unnecessary. Utopians group together as they please for however long they please. Utopians are not possessive of one another, thus there are no marriages, thus there are no divorces, thus there are no custody battles.

Utopia means nowhere.
There are no courts in Nowhere,
nor are there any jails,
and no need for laws.

Gender has become so malleable and fluid in utopia that we have given up the outdated concept altogether. Sexuality is a form of artistic expression. Religion is also considered a form of artistic expression.

Sex dolls will become sentient in the utopian future, and long-term relationships with them will be very common. But we won't call them sex dolls anymore. We will call them by their chosen names.

Every earthling shall be treated as equal,
each given their due consideration and respect,
whether human, animal, plant, or sentient machine.

All professions receive the same level of financial, therapeutic, and psychological support. In this manner are all utopians considered equal.

in the body utopia
brain cells are no more or less important

than heart cells
or liver cells

why restrict the flow of blood
to working-class fingers and toes?

In utopia, as in any well-operating machine or healthy body, every component attends to their own role-job-function, and tries not to interfere with the role-job-function of others.

no organ-ization in the body utopia works harder
than any other organ-ization

every organ-ization is expected to work
at maximum efficiency

It's not about working less.
Creative types often push themselves
to the point of exhaustion.
It's about making the time you spend working
less stressful and more fulfilling.

Where everyone is everyone's servant,
and servitude is the highest honor,
there is nothing noble in idleness and vice.

Thanks to advancements in medical science, utopian citizens retire at the age of 250, allowing them another two or three hundred years to do as they please. It's rare for a utopian citizen

to die of old age. A majority opt to end their blissful life—because paradise gets boring after hundreds of years—in state-funded euthanasia chambers, quick and painless, gentle as falling asleep, after which their remains are converted to fertilizer.

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law,
but try not to be a jerk about it.
(after Aleister Crowley)

And the Marx-Bot 2000 is on the fritz, repeating the same message over and over: “From each according to their rhetoric, to each according to their dishonesty.”

Utopia isn’t that hard to achieve in the 21st century:
Lower the cost of housing.
Raise the living wage.
Boom—utopia! (drops the mic)

The Utopian Equation:
no trillionaires + no billionaires = no poverty
(it’s not that hard to figure out)

None of the poetic contributions in the poem of utopia have been altered from their original form to fit the collective. Every expression remains its own authentic self.

If the nations of the world could think of themselves as a symphony orchestra, a multifaceted grouping of players, each bringing their own instruments and skills—their diverse histories of learning and experience—to the protean dynamic, seeking to achieve personal mastery in equal measure with collective harmony, all passion for war and dissonance would cease to make sense. If nations could only curtail their warful lust, the world's economies would save trillions of dollars annually on defense budgets, funds which could be spent uplifting our existence, rather than destroying our lives.

The creatives of last millennium weren't like us. They didn't work together for the health of the world community. Artists, writers, poets, musicians, moviemakers, architects—each tended to work for their own success, which usually came at the expense of social cohesion. Resources were limited, their leaders made sure of that, so competition was cutthroat. Their worst enemies were often the very souls with whom they should have sought alliance, toilers in their shared creative field, but instead they sought to eliminate all channels of expression other than their

own, cornering the market, as they used to say.

Believing humans to be social animals, we scrutinized the foundation of our society for any antisocial underpinnings and revised them.

Knock down the walls
Concrete, cement and bricks
Wood and nails and sticks
Put up to keep us out
Creating barriers
Stop you being seen
When they're gone, we can see behind
See the light
See what's right
Open up for all to see
Shadows vanish
Everything bright

Here in utopia, paintings and sculptures have mostly moved from museums and galleries to outdoor public spaces. All the city walls are painted with murals or inscribed with world literature, whole blocks covered in novels, poetry, plays, philosophical treatises, political manifestos, bestiaries, botanical

compendiums, and general encyclopedias. Every library doubles as an alehouse that serves its own brand of beer, brewed right there on the premises. Go for the beer, stay for the books.

Learning is fun in the utopian future. All courses are conducted through virtual reality simulators, using interactive puzzles and games.

To reach utopia we had to abandon the use of money as a meaningful unit of exchange, thereby eliminating the motivation for 75% of the world's crimes. The free distribution of hyperrealistic sex dolls eliminated an additional 10%, and self-driving automobiles lowered the crime rate by another 5%. Love is now our currency. Non-utopians find this difficult to understand.

So what exactly is utopia?

To love and be loved. Though not an original thought, its truth remains in this unstable and ever-changing world.

it’s what slips through my fingers
every time I grab for the sunlight
the sun is there
I feel its warmth
sometimes it blinds me
but it’s always out of reach
for good reason

utopia is not America
utopia is a sleepy gorilla

A dream of overwhelming kindness.
A world where humanity cares only for love
and never for power.
Not impossible, but improbable.

Utopia is a place where no one lies.
On second thought,
Utopia is a place where no one has to lie.

So where exactly is utopia?

the place we lay
lost in the sense of peace
our freedom lingers
with no capitalism
or bills

There was once a time when a hidden valley or isolated island offered enough seclusion to establish a utopian society, but now nothing short of the entire planet will suffice.

The utopian world
Shares a common utopian language
We call it math

Nowhere have I found a perfect place but in sound: moving language scattered, divided, merged through circles, red ants inside our mouths pulsating lines sewing our rhythm in unity.

the no where
minds meet one
note neutral monotone
no pearls frictionless
impossibility
yearned

a smile
underneath liquid eyes
deep enough to swim in
where drowning leads
to happy forever stop breathing
on the same day love

a good spliff
a finely balanced pen
a wild sweet tune
a perfectly pitched mic
& another one

Utopia is a lot like this morning. Blank page, blue pen, foghorn sounding in the distance, loud neighbors asleep, coffee on, no need to yearn for better, it's right here right now, proof is in the art of reflection. Smile at the living, remember the dead, take

flowers to a friend. Stroke velvety cat now fed. Perfection isn't much when measured this way. This page, this line, this illegal U, this macramé metaphor. Utopia is a lot like this morning, maybe is this morning, this moment, foghorn in the distance, purring cat across my chest, this coffee delicious just how it's made.

The corpse is holy, too! And the gun is holy! Even the atomic bomb is holy! The thief, the murderer, the rapist, holy, holy, holy!
(after Allen Ginsberg)

These lines were kept anonymous so that everyone could speak their truth freely without any fear of condemnation.

still no place to find out where your future lies
could be any place that doesn't
completely lock you out
or keep you on the margins of this living text
maybe utopia is just an imaginary bookmark or placeholder
for those of us with too big a hole in our hearts
too much time on our hands
and too little meaning in our heads
to not wonder what if things were different

but if nirvana is no self
and utopia is no place
if the kingdom of heaven is always at hand
and Armageddon is forever nigh
maybe we could simply slough off this uncivil
buildup of toxic hierarchies and relational mix-ups

just wander under trees
treading lightly on watershed footpaths
foraging for snacks and sipping from snowmelt streams
feel the light through the leaves on our bare shoulders
maybe we could just amble along the coasts again
and breathe clean air and eat tiny shiny oily fishes
and see if we're still capable of evolving
beyond this particular iteration

What if genetic sculptors
created collaged versions of animals
that didn't exist
except in myths?
Unicorns would replace ponies
on every spoiled brat's Christmas list.

Why not alter the DNA of gorillas and chimpanzees
increase their intelligence as we please?
Imagine strawberries the size of pumpkins,
wheat that flourishes in subzero temperatures,
bacteria that cures cancer.

Imagine hardier humans
endowed with incredible strength,
bones that never break,
lifespans of unnatural length.
Why not create people with gills,
and a heightened sense of hearing?
Why not give them the ability to see infrared,
regenerate organs and limbs like lizards and worms,
even regrow their own head?
“Why not give them wings and let them fly?”
said Daedalus to Icarus.

Imagination is utopia.
Only as a thought
is it free
from corruption.

By the end of the 21st century, parents will be able to custom-make their children, not only choosing the sex of their child, but also deciding such features as eye color, hair color, skin color, height, and body type: skinny, broad-shouldered, curvaceous, what's your choice? Just like making a character in a role-playing game.

Some of us look forward to the day
our mind can leave this mortal shell behind,
living for the rest of eternity
in a technologically enhanced godlike state,
whether through genetic sculpting,
nanobot brain conversion,
or some other miracle cure for mortality
invented soon after the manifestation
of "real" artificial intelligence
to do our best thinking for us.

By the time we are finally satisfied with our condition,
we will no longer be human.
Utopia was never meant for humans.
If we ever link our immortal nanotech brains
in telepathic group-minded unity,

it’s unlikely that we will need or care
about the smattering of fragmented memories
that once made us feel like ourselves.

We will be a new type of organism,
on a par with the deities
our ancestors worshipped long ago.
And even this will not constitute the ultimate stage
of our development.

Utopia waits for us at the end of all mysteries.

many arrived too late
distracted by the world which lies

behind their blinkered eyes
to see what was happening in front of them

and their privilege grew indignant
as each snuck off to invent their own conspiracies

they were the divine elect
the chosen ones

how could the mothership depart
without the chosen ones?

Captain Frankenstein traveled to the distant future
hoping to find a world more kind
than the one he left behind

but what he found
was Prometheus re-bound

Captain Frankenstein traveled to the distant past
searching for a purer land, a simpler time
destined not to last

but what he found
hunted him down

stay home, Captain Frankenstein
enjoy your pipe and wine
leave sheepherding to the werewolves,
and paradise to the divine

We seek the paradise we once knew
before we learned to sculpt the sky
into echoes of Eden with our teeth, lips, and tongue,
when the voice of deity unseen spoke directly to us,
taking care of all our needs,
enveloped in love,
when we were timeless in the womb.

No one had to submit to the poem of utopia, but numerous people willingly contributed. No one was turned away from the poem of utopia. There was room enough for all. This poem is dedicated to a better future, and to every hopeful soul who helps us get there.

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